Bulletin Number Three

Price Ten Cents

EXPERIMENTAL SCHOOLS

THE PLAY SCHOOL

CONTENTS

BUREAU *of* EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS
70 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
1917

ON THE DOCKS

THE BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERIMENTS

The Bureau of Educational Experiments is made up of a group of persons who are engaged in first-hand efforts for improving the education of children, and who have all shared in the general movement that has brought about a more scientific study of them. They feel that the development of some more comprehensive plans for utilizing the results of the recent interest in "free education" is the next step, and that it depends essentially upon securing a closer cooperation among experimenters.

Among the noticeable features of the present educational situation are: a broader view of education, which makes well considered experimenting a much sought-for opportunity; the emergence of a considerable number of educators who are really experimentally minded; the accumulation of a large amount of highly specialized experience; the appearance of a considerable literature dealing with experimental procedures; and the gradual sorting out of doubtful experiments from those that have more permanent usefulness. To this situation the Bureau hopes to contribute by affording an opportunity to increase the value of all experiments through cooperative effort, and by preserving and making permanent those experiments that may suitably become parts of an organized system of experimental education.

The Bureau aims to accomplish these ends by giving support to present experiments; by initiating new experiments; by collecting and making available for public use information about the whole field of experiments in education; and by hastening the introduction of newly acquired methods through actual teaching experiments.

The active members of the Bureau form a general committee, or Working Council, which, through various departments or committees, has entire charge of the work of the Bureau.

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PREFACE

As an effort to secure cooperation among those who are working through experimental schools, the Bureau of Educational Experiments presents the first of a series of bulletins on experiments in education.

In some instances the articles are signed by the persons responsible for the school. In others they are the work of Lucile Deming, field-worker for the Bureau.

No evaluation of the schools in question has been attempted. The desire of the Committee has been to preserve as far as possible the fundamental integrity of each school in the account which it offers, and its end will be served if the information which it is distributing discovers to the various experimenters their common interest and purpose and stimulates the impulse to pool their knowledge and experience in a comprehensive scheme of education for children.

The bulletins of this series which are to appear this spring are listed below.

Bulletin III.—The Play School.
Caroline Pratt

List of Experimental Schools
References

Bulletin IV.—The Gregory School
Edith Barnum

The Children's School
Margaret Naumburg

Teachers College Playground
Mary Rankin

Bulletin V.—The Home School at Sparkill, New York
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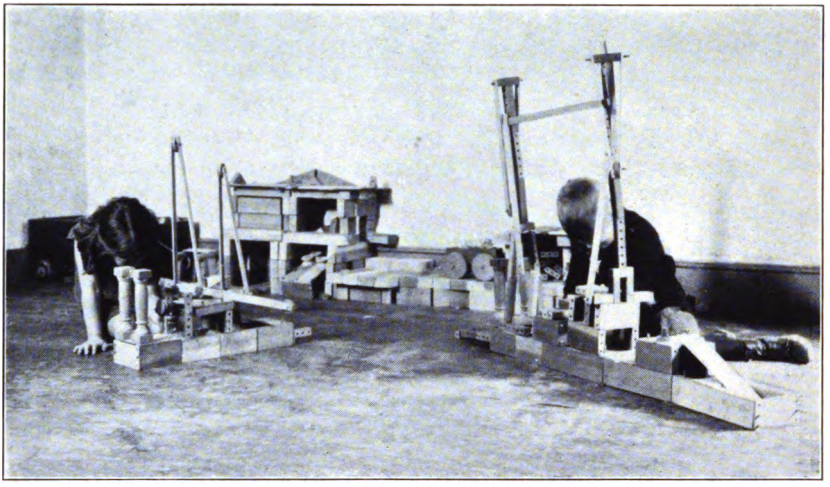
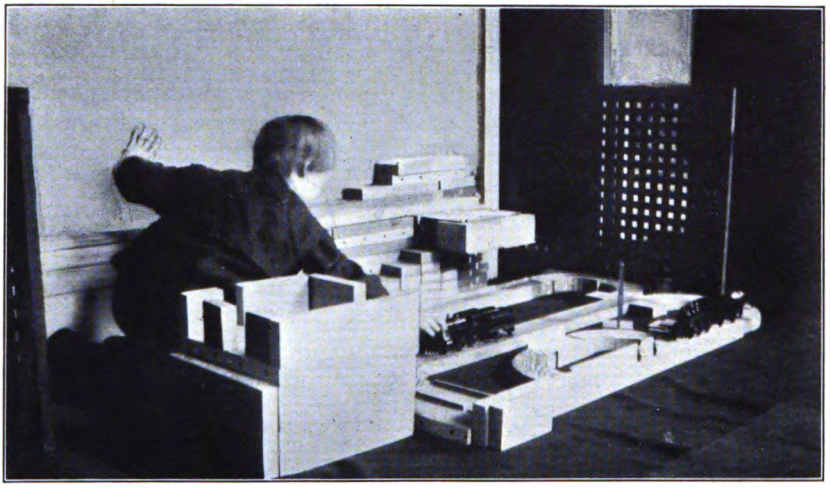
Other bulletins published by the Bureau are:

Bulletin I.—Playthings
Bulletin II.—Study of Animal Families in Schools



EXPERIMENTING IN CONSTRUCTION



A TRUNK LINE

THE PLAY SCHOOL

AN EXPERIMENT IN EDUCATION

The attempt in the Play School has been to place the children in an environment through which by experiment with that environment they may become self-educated. As the educational elements in every environment are limited, the school has consciously undertaken to provide for them and recognize them in relation to the different age periods in the growth of children. The children are given free opportunity in the enriched environment to occupy themselves according to their individual needs or desires. Their choice and efforts are encouraged; their fears, if they have any, are broken down; their self-consciousness swamped in their interest in the possibilities which the environment offers. Where the school is successful, the children become in the first few months of school life, full-fledged experimenters with all that that implies.

The school had the courage to adopt the experimental method as its educational basis because it was recognized as the child's own method, by which, for example, he learned to walk and talk. All the children were, as a matter of fact, experimenters before coming to the school at four years of age, and the method had become a habit, either strong or weak, as they had lived in free or limited opportunities. In the school, where the children come in contact with other children and receive suggestions from each other, the impetus to experiment is intensified.

The traditions of established educational institutions are against experimentation. The term "experiments" as generally used, refers to the teacher and not to the children, whereas the freedom of the children is the first essential of school experimentation. There are innumerable experiments *on children* in methods of teaching; methods of teaching reading, writing, shop-work, music, and so on. But until these are applied to groups of children free to accept or reject them, the experimental method of education is not being used and the real experiment is still for the future.

Opponents of the experimental method claim that choice of occupation results in specialization. In the experience of the school with children between the ages of four and eight (at the present time the oldest

class is under nine) this is not true. All the children *choose* and undertake to do everything which the opportunity offers. Moreover, the longer the children are in school, the more diversified do their interests become. Those children who entered the school at seven or eight instead of four, are, as a matter of fact, the specialized children. They have invariably had less opportunity for choice than have the children in the school.

The usual criticism that comes from educators is that children never would become educated under the circumstances described. The community, accepting the educators' ideal of literacy, believes that the school has accomplished its purpose when such ends as reading and writing have been accomplished.

To meet the above criticism is not yet possible. A school that is experimental is concerned with the process and not with any such fixed end. I cannot prove that the children will become educated under the Play School method because the school has not carried them over a sufficiently long period. The school has been in operation only four years, and it will take another four at least before results can be considered. Also the school has not so consistently followed its own method as it hopes to. Each year it learns from the experience of the past year its failures and apparent gains. But I do claim now that the experimental attitude is the scientific attitude which is as basic in education as in other fields of inquiry and activity. It is the practical procedure for a school because it is the scientific procedure. The school may be wrong in the selection of material, but its use of the material is scientific.

Another difficulty is the fact that the school has been compelled to work on assumptions regarding environment in relation to the age periods. Some of these assumptions are possibly sound, some without doubt it will be discovered are wrong. The school is constantly on the watch to revise them. Their valuations would be simpler if the children who came to the school had not been coerced. Before any considerable body of information can be gathered which is based upon scientific observation of children in relation to their age periods, experiment stations (to speak in terms of the Agricultural Department) must be multiplied. The teachers must be more scientific than they are to-day in their observations, and psychologists must bring their material more successfully than they have done into usable form.

In discussing the Play School, I wish particularly to avoid the crystalization of any part of our practice or environment. There is

nothing final about either. In the following presentation of our work it should be remembered that it is all open to criticism and modification by anyone who can propose a better plan. In fact it fails in so far as it escapes criticism, and in so far as the work does not attract people who want to experiment. The real purpose of the school lies in its development as an experiment station where children can be observed.

The following are some of the things that the Play School has acknowledged in its environment. First, that the children already live and have developed, and will continue to live and develop, in surroundings with which the school has had nothing to do. Second, that children have always had a tendency to carry out in play the processes which they have seen going on about them. Third, that the complexity of modern life makes it necessary to interpret it for the children if they are to understand and use and adapt themselves to it. Fourth, that to carry out these processes they must have tools and materials suited to their childish purpose. Fifth, that any social enterprise, such as a school, creates its own problems which have to be met, and that these problems may be met naturally in a school by the children themselves.

It is only fair to recognize that the natural place for children in a world devised for grown people is that of onlookers at their pursuits, and as creators or producers only in the field of play. The unnatural or artificial attitude, as we term it, treats the children as if what they do is important in real situations in the grown-up's scheme of life. I do not minimize in saying this the importance of the tasks which children do in their homes, such as caring for their own arrangements, though I believe it is easy to carry this too far. But no scheme of education should centralize in *tasks* no matter how joyfully these tasks are undertaken. We are often misled by a five-year-old child who loves "to help" and disappointed to the point of despair when this desire disappears as it is apt to do a year later. There is no occasion for this feeling. We should be able to look at the change as an indication that the youngster has more of his own life to express and wants to do it in his own way. He is on the road to become a strong little player which argues well for his becoming a strong worker at a later period.

In a world devised for adults, any environment which is arranged for children is open to the criticism of being artificial. Some time in the future when industry, commerce, art, publicity and all social enterprises are developed in the measure to which they contribute to the growth of the race; when libraries, picture galleries and zoological gardens are arranged for children as well as adults; when parks and

playgrounds and streets serve the purpose of the whole community rather than the interests of a few, and when the attitude of the grown-ups is an educational one, we may turn our children loose in an environment which will permit them to grow in a natural way, and thus escape artificiality. But until this comes we shall have to adopt some plan of education which is confessedly artificial and try to reduce the artificiality to a minimum.

This is what is attempted in the Play School. The school is but a small part of the environment of the children who attend it. It should be regarded as a convenient laboratory, work-shop, studio, furnished with all the necessary appliances. The school, however, does not depend upon these appliances for the impulse to use them, but rather upon the impetus which the child gets from his interests in outside things.

The youngest children are taken on trips through the streets. The activities they see around them are interpreted, sometimes by workmen engaged in an operation which the children are watching and sometimes by the teacher. The children in their seventh year are taken into work-shops and factories and have an opportunity to observe the processes and discover their significance. The traffic in the streets is explained to the first year children, their attention called to the different kinds of wagons, trucks, trains of cars and steamships. The traffic unexplained is confusion to the small observer. "What is the use of a horse?" I asked a city boy. "To fall down in the street," he answered. The real and vital significance of street life is lost in the general confusion, but the accident separated from the general confusion attracts attention without calling forth intellectual effort. The movement of things like traffic attracts little children, but constant and unexplained, ceases to arouse curiosity. The interpretation of the traffic, that is, getting at its significance, is to simplify the processes for them. From their curiosity about carriers their interest naturally broadens to a consideration of food, clothing and shelter. This is the method which the Play School adopts to establish an acquaintance between the child and the big world.

The children without exception are expected to take the trips. What each child gets is an individual matter depending largely upon what he already has; it may be only an impulse to do *something*. Only occasionally do the children make use of the impressions they gather from the trip immediately after they have acquired them. With the youngest children the Play School does not follow the practice which is usual in schools, of suggesting to them that they interpret the trips, but leaves it to each child to bring out in his own time and his own way what a trip has meant to him. The seven and eight-year-old children,

NOT QUITE FRIENDS

however, are induced to connect the trips with their school play where they do not make the connection for themselves. That is, their attention is called to the informative facts of a trip and the possibilities for reconstruction.

These trips are of great importance in offering the children opportunity for first hand information and in training them in observation. Nor is this information isolated from the children's purpose. For example, the activities of building a subway, transferring the materials dug out, and transporting other materials for construction suggest an adaptation of blocks, toys and other school room materials which is "play" with an entirely new significance. I am not at all sure that this interpretation of play is not a revolutionary step in education; it is newer in the educational process than structural iron work is in building. In the Play School we have not discovered the limitations to this kind of play—I doubt whether there are any.

The ideal is to pass by for the present accidental facts and center the interest in the related facts. There is no necessity for a superficial correlation of science, art, literature, geography and arithmetic in the school program if the whole problem is approached from the viewpoint of human relations, such as industry and its manifestations, because the correlation has already been made fundamentally. When nature study,

for example, is applied to human activities, it throws the study of plants and animals into the background, and makes a study of them contributory to the real purpose of understanding human life. The study of past events so approached, becomes a means of interpretation of the present, where the interest is naturally centered. Although employed in a limited way in the Play School, the fundamental human relations are the underlying connection between school processes; a connection which has been one of the main quests of modern educators. An interest in the relation of things human can be begun and is begun in the Play School with the youngest group. The children of seven and eight ask pertinent questions and answer questions which they put to themselves on a basis of related facts. The school expects this treatment of the informative side of the process to lead the children to books to supplement their knowledge. The information acquired by the children is thus the result of their own observation, and the relations between their fields of information are based on observable human relations.

Such treatment of the informational side of the educational process I believe makes the school a living force. The pursuit of information is never regarded as an object in itself. It is the *process* of *getting* the *information* which is important. Giving children answers to no matter how pertinent questions never will educate them. They must be given the power to educate themselves, and this means as far as information contributes to their education they must know the sources.

With the informational side provided for, it becomes a simple matter, if such information is basic, to provide the child with the means to express both himself and the limited bits of the world with which he is becoming acquainted. Toys and blocks and materials of construction such as work-benches and tools are provided for all ages at present represented in the school, that is for children from 4 to 8 years old. It is true that toys and blocks do not respond to the need of a child who has no related knowledge to fall back upon. If a child does not know that a horse's home is a stable, where he is fed and cared for; if he does not know the use either of a horse or a wagon, it is useless to present him with a horse and wagon to play with. Parents, I think, fail to recognize that this is the answer to their query, "Why do my children always destroy their toys?"

A child can do very little with an isolated toy, but a few related toys typical of his environment furnish a stimulus if he is given space as well as blocks and building materials. The Play School toys are related in kind and size, but they are not numerous. It is important

that the children supplement the adult's unfinished stock by constructing toys for their own special use. The construction of those the school supplies is sufficiently simple and obvious to suggest the possibility of making other toys. The four and five-year-old children turn the school furnishings into play materials. In their dramatic activities they use their floor rugs, tables and chairs, and the screens which divide their play spaces, turning them into fire engines or locomotives, or using them to build hospitals, restaurants and all sorts of houses. In innumerable ways they serve their dramatic purposes.

I think in calling these materials *free* materials I can best distinguish them from the materials of the kindergarten and Montessori schools. Their uses are various. They are not designed for some special educational purpose of an adult, but are incident to child life and child purpose. They offer the greatest opportunity for the children's experimentation. The school is still searching for other materials as the children's play suggests new and wider needs.

The school provides in the first two years for a certain amount of isolation of each child. The floor is spaced off with the low screens mentioned above to protect the children's play schemes from outside interference. Very young children can contribute little to a group until through their own experimenting they have gained something real of their own. In their dramatic efforts and common play they use the school equipment which served to isolate them in their individual play. It is the intention of the school to extend this double use of equipment in the play-grounds of the school.

One of the contributions which I hope the Play School may make to education is in art expression. There are possibilities of an art life in every individual, just as there are possibilities of an intellectual life, and by art life I do not mean art appreciation or criticism but art expression. The failure to develop art impulse in education is partly due to the non-recognition of the fact that the free play of children *is* art. When this is appreciated, art expression will be developed during the period of school experience. As the children play with drawing materials, with plasticine, with blocks and toys, with words, with dramatics, the emotions are freed and in a primitive way art is produced. The emotional processes in the children's play are identical with the processes we call art in adult life, and which, with an acquired technique, give us art production. It is what the modern school of artists in their simplified methods of expression try to realize.

The Play School provides a supply of drawing materials for the

free use of the children, limited only when they show a desire to waste them. Their desire to draw is not restricted. They are not criticised in their drawings, but stimulated. They are encouraged to represent bits of experience rather than isolated objects. The common practice of giving children objects to draw does not lead them on or stimulate their imagination. A brand new isolated object means no more to a child than it does to a grown person. He will pass it by just as a grown person does unless he can apply it or unless it is bound up in a comprehensive conception. The school has been criticised for stimulating the concept in drawing on the ground that it tends to representation rather than design, but I am confident that with little children the opposite is the case. If the very small children represent bits of experience in their drawings they begin to arrange the elements and gain composition as well as design.

Language expression is provided for through the telling of stories and relating of personal incidents. As the stories are told they are written down by the teachers and kept as a part of the child's record, together with the drawings, which are filed chronologically. As language is as utilitarian with children as it is with grown people it is necessary consciously to design to use it as an art. When a child tells a story he must hold the interest of the group. The teacher does not force the other children to attend. This stimulates the child who tells the story to choose his words. He becomes interested in words and experiments or plays with them very much as he does with his crayons in drawing.

The question of reading and writing for little children is a baffling one. It may be necessary to determine while the children are very young, while they are three or four years old, for instance, which are destined to have difficulties in the use of symbols, and to direct their attention to the value of symbols in their play schemes.

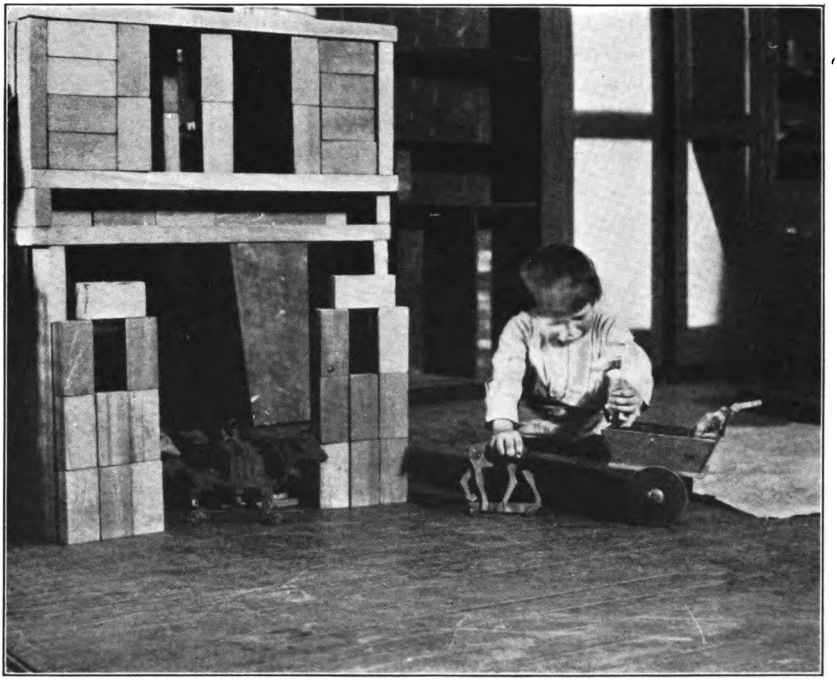
The acquirement of the technique of reading and writing has been met in one group by requiring a half-hour per day of directed effort. This has been done quite frankly and several children have learned to read and write without more time. But it must be acknowledged as a significant fact that at least half our children in the group are totally uninterested in reading as a means to acquirement and in writing as a means of expression. As laboratory equipment they find little use for either.

The approach to arithmetic has been made very simply in connection with bench-work and the carrying on of a real store with real money as the medium of exchange. The children have an interest in using tools,

including a rule, and in using money, and through these they are familiar with the fundamental arithmetical processes.

Of the many things toward which we think our plan of work is tending, we are particularly encouraged in the opportunity afforded for imagination. The children are using this so constantly that it escapes observation. Even with those children whom we are inclined to designate as unimaginative the opportunity to think beyond, to anticipate the next step in play schemes for which they individually are responsible results in the training of imagination. In dealing with children we may congratulate ourselves that no young child can carry out imitative processes to any extent. He may get his impulse through desire to do just what some other child has done but he is protected from carrying it out by lack of training. He diverges and in doing so comes as near creation as it is possible to do. This divergence tends to become a habit and if the child is left to his own devices or encouraged to pursue his efforts as an individual instead of being forced into group activity, I believe he will go through life with a tendency to anticipate, plan, imagine, initiate or whatever one may choose to call this quality.

CAROLINE PRATT.



BUILDING FOR A PURPOSE

CHILDREN IN THE PLAY SCHOOL

The Play School experiment is enchanting enough in itself when one considers that its philosophy suggests that all the vivid interest, the activity and color and joyous freedom it produces might belong to life in general. But its setting is also unique and delightful—in a studio at the end of MacDougal Alley, decorated in an unusual variety of gracious colors laid out and planned in shapes of triangles and diamonds that satisfy the mind and quiet the eye. The effect is both child-like and charming. A balcony where the five-year-old children work overhangs the room adding to the amount of floor space sufficiently so that each child can be comparatively alone. This and the adjoining room of the seven and eight-year-old group can be thrown into one for general activities like dancing. Above there is a library room and a good-sized workshop. The school was started five years ago in a little old-fashioned house. Two groups of children are still attending there, but will be moved to rooms nearer the rest next year.

The furniture bears little resemblance to that in the traditional schoolroom. There are individual tables and little chairs, and attractive cupboards and shelves where all the materials lie within easy reach of the children. In the yard with its gaily painted fence a family of rabbits and of pigeons have their homes. Other animals are brought regularly for study. In the yard also are climbing poles, bars, a see-saw, a sand pile, garden tools, and a group of packing boxes recently moved in, which the children are now transforming into a village.

Most of the equipment is something like the raw material needed for the purposes of living. It lends itself chiefly to creative and imaginative activity. There are blocks, short, square, triangular; curved ones that make fine corners for train tracks, and long ones, some of which stand taller than the children who build big houses with them. Other blocks that fit together with pegs make all sorts of things, including automobiles, derricks, and other machinery that the children have seen. The block houses are alive with dolls of different sizes who in the roles of men, women and children, stand, sit, walk and drive and do all the things children see people doing about them in the real world. The wooden horses, cows and other animals are of related size to the dolls, as are also the dump carts, milk wagons and railroad trains. These

toys are made of wood and are easily reproduced by the children in the workshop. Some of the professional dolls and all of the animals are painted in characteristic colors. A policeman doll suggests to the child the need of a street corner and when at length a city is built up around this beginning a farm may next be located where the child can keep a cow from which to get his city's milk supply. This indicates the possibilities which the children themselves find in the material.

All of the classes take weekly trips out into the city to visit factories, bakeries and stores, to follow automobile trucks to their destinations and see what happens there, to see the docks where food supplies, coal, and raw and manufactured products from all over the world are unloaded from the ships. Whatever the child gets from these experiences is likely to appear later in his play. The portfolios of drawings on the shelves as they fill up during the year with the graphic records of scenes which have been running through the children's minds, provide a wealth of material from which to study the interests of the individual child.

The plan carried out in drawing is characteristic of the method of the school. Drawing materials in abundance are at hand as if they were the natural right of the child—colored crayons, water color paints and large sheets of paper. The children work with entire freedom. No criticism is ever made by the teachers. The only suggestions are put in the form of a question that relates to action and will raise some visual answer in the child's mind. If he says, "This is a man," the teacher may ask, "Where is he going?" Her attempt is always to encourage in the play the reproduction of "blocks of experience" rather than of unrelated or isolated objects. An eminent artist who has recently seen the collection of drawings exclaimed with pleasure at the composition and color that has been arrived at by the children themselves.

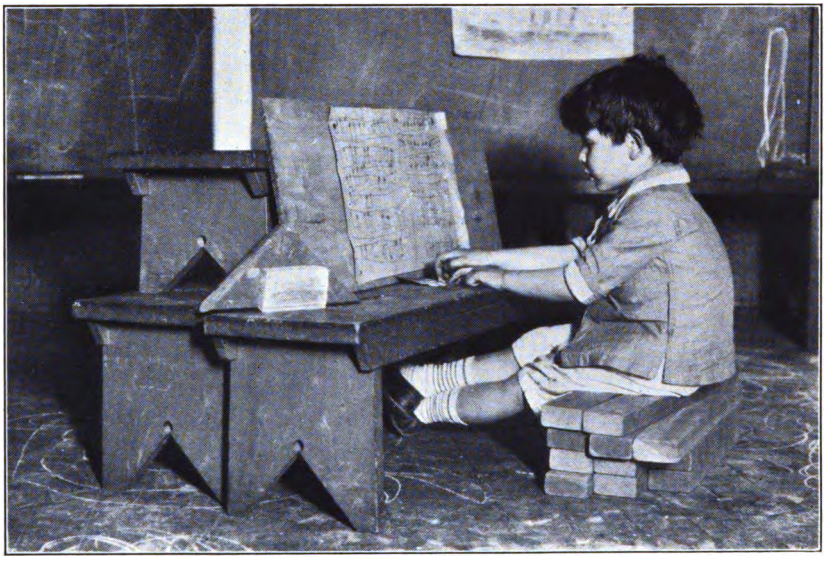
Another material that appeals to the children greatly is clay. The smallest child will pat and pound and roll, and if you happen by he may tell you, "This is a worm! And this is a cake and a flower!" You may ask him where the worm came from, but if you suggest that he can make the flower look more like one (to you), you will be violating the spirit of the school.

The work-shop is equipped with four substantial benches and all of the best ordinary carpenter's tools. Children of four and five discover how to use the saws and planes and chisels for themselves. They make carts and automobiles, Fifth Avenue busses, boats, and toy furniture. A child's standard of satisfaction with his product is the mark of its

success for the teacher. If he is pleased, she does not see the crooked edges and corners. A five-year-old, working by himself, who found that he could make the square window he wanted in a box by starting with the augur and bit and then inserting a key-hole saw, had had exactly the kind of experience of trial and discovery the school hopes to provide continually for him.

The Play School has found that the children's impulse to play is real and continuous enough to sustain day-long, spontaneous, purposeful activity in the school. But it is something also easily destroyed by lack of a fostering environment—children who enter the school later than four years old are sometimes already slightly changed by the influences of conventional repression. In activities like the dancing they may join with complete abandon. But in using tools and materials their spontaneous interest may at first be less absorbing. Professor John Dewey has said that "To be playful and serious at the same time is possible and it defines the ideal mental condition." This essential spirit of freedom for joyous and effective living it is the hope of the Play School to preserve.

LUCILE P. DEMING.



LITTLE "HAROLD BAUER"

List of Experimental Schools

The Berkeley Play School (Summer)—University of California, Berkeley, Cal.
Mr. and Mrs. W. Clark Hetherington.

Boyland—Santa Barbara, Cal.
Mr. Prince Hopkins.

The Elementary School—Boston.
Miss Faye Henley.

The Ellis School—Newton Centre, Mass.
Miss Evelyn Ellis.

The Ethical Culture School (First Grade)—
Central Park West and 63rd Street, New York.
Mrs. Helen Speer.

The Fairhope School—Fairhope, Alabama.
Mrs. Marietta Johnson.

The Gregory Public School—West Orange, N. J.
Miss Edith Barnum.

The Home School—Sparkill, N. Y.
Miss Mattie B. Bates.

The Francis Scott Key School—Baltimore, Md.
Miss Persis Miller.

The Horace Mann Kindergarten—Teachers College,
Columbia University, N. Y. C.
Prof. Patty Smith Hill,
Miss Charlotte Garrison.

The Horace Mann School (First Grade)—
525 West 120th Street, N. Y. C.
Miss F. Mabel McVey.

The Laboratory School—157 East 72nd Street, N. Y. C.
Miss Sarah Fiske,
Miss Estelle de Young.

The Lanier School—Greenwich, Conn.
Mrs. Marietta Johnson,
Mrs. Charles D. Lanier.

MARIENFELD PLANTATION SCHOOL—Samarcand, N. C.
DR. C. HANFORD HENDERSON.

THE MERION COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL—Merion Station, Penn.
MISS GERTRUDE HARTMAN.

THE CHILDREN'S SCHOOL—34 West 68th Street, New York City.
MISS MARGARET NAUMBURG.

THE ORCHARD SCHOOL—Leonia, N. J.
MRS. WILLIAM G. NOYES.

THE OPEN AIR SCHOOL—119 East 40th Street, New York City.
MISS LEILA M. WILHELM.

THE PARK SCHOOL—Buffalo, N. Y.
MARY HAMMETT LEWIS.

THE PARK SCHOOL—Baltimore, Md.
PROF. EUGENE RANDOLPH SMITH.

THE PHOEBE ANNA THORNE OPEN AIR MODEL SCHOOL—
Bryn Mawr, Penn.
DR. M. DE CASTRO.

THE PLAY SCHOOL—206 West 13th Street, N. Y. C.
MISS CAROLINE PRATT.

THE PORTER RURAL SCHOOL—Kirksville, Missouri.
MRS. MARIE TURNER HARVEY.

THE SCHOOL OF CHILDHOOD—University of Pittsburg, Pittsburg.
PROF. WILL GRANT CHAMBERS.
MISS MEREDITH SMITH.

THE SOCIAL MOTIVE SCHOOL—540 West 114th Street, N. Y. C.
MISS BERTHA BENTLY.

STONY FORD SCHOOL—Stony Ford, New York.
MRS. DELIA D. HUTCHINSON.
MR. ROBERT H. HUTCHINSON.

TEACHERS COLLEGE EXPERIMENTAL PLAYGROUND—Teachers College,
Columbia University, N. Y.
MISS MARY RANKIN.

Note.—The Department of Information desires the cooperation of persons acquainted with experimental school work in extending the above list and in collecting information regarding such schools.

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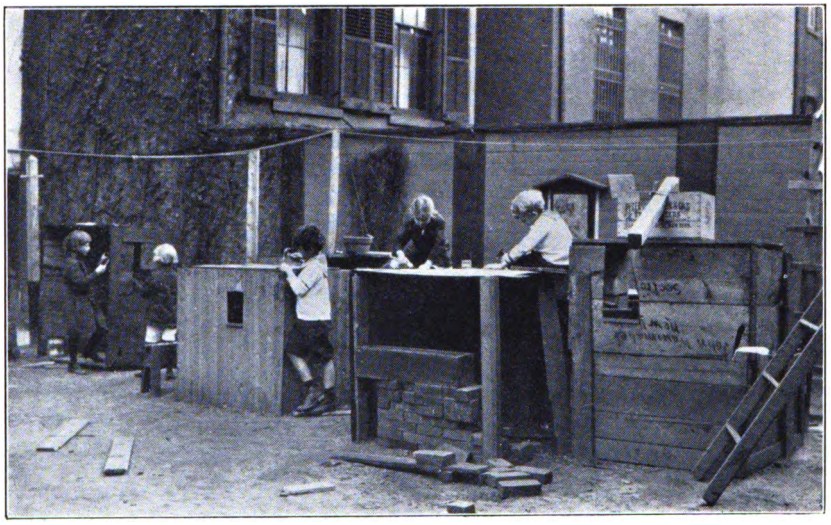

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